

Samuel F. Bell House
County Route CC
Center vicinity
Ralls County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1204

HABS
Mo
87-CENT.V
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

SAMUEL F. BELL HOUSE

HABS
MO
87-CENT.V
1-

Location: Near the end of County Route CC, 0.3 mile east of the Salt River, about 6 miles northwest of Center, Ralls County, Missouri.

USGS Center 7- $\frac{1}{2}$ ' Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 15.618610.4379520.

Present Owner: United States of America, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District (August 1978).

Present Use: Vacant. Located in the Clarence Cannon Dam and Reservoir Project Area.

Significance: The Samuel F. Bell House is an example of a two-story, single-pile (one room deep), five-bay house, with central stair and end chimneys, and has a single-story rear ell contemporaneous with the front section. The plan is a familiar vernacular type, and the finish details show a lingering taste for Italianate features common a generation earlier. The house contains three folk murals (one of which remains exposed) painted about 1950 on the plaster walls.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1880-81.
2. Architect/builder: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Samuel F. Bell House is located in the southeast quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 12, Township 55 North, Range 7 West. The house was built on land originally settled in 1855 by John Wilson, Hamilton Berry, John M. Leake and William Pulis. The following references are from the property abstract in the possession of Mr. Earl Batty, RFD, Center, Missouri:
 - 1876 Warranty Deed, August 5, 1876. Recorded in Book 28, page 270. Hamilton Berry to Samuel Bell. \$2000.
 - 1891 Administration Deed, August 10, 1891. Recorded in Book 51, page 47. Samuel Bell, by J.W. Bell, administrator of estate (Bell had died on February 24, 1882, leaving the house to his wife, Elizabeth) to Fidellis Hagar. \$1874.
 - 1891 Quit Claim Deed, August 18, 1891. Recorded in Book 37, page 362. Fidellis and Mary Hagar to Elizabeth E. Bell. \$700.

- 1906 Warranty Deed, March 9, 1906. Recorded in Book 77, page 423. Elizabeth Bell, Mary and Fidellis Hagar, Ida and Thomas Griffin, and Rosa and Cleatus Leake to George Jones. 77 acres for \$3088. The title reads: "Elizabeth Bell, Mary Hagar, Ida Griffin, Rosa Leake, and Cordelia Jones, wife of said George Jones are the sole and only heirs of Samuel Bell deceased and this deed is intended to convey the whole of said land except interest of the said Cordelia Jones."
- 1948 Warranty Deed, February 16, 1948. Recorded in Book 146, page 557. George R. Jones and Cordelia Jones to Sara Smith. 71 acres for \$1.
- 1948 Warranty Deed, February 16, 1948. Recorded in Book 146, page 558. Sara Smith to George R. Jones and Cordelia Jones. 71 acres for \$1. "Note: Habendum clause recites that the grantees hold as tenants by the entireties."
- 1952 Warranty Deed, June 6, 1952. Recorded in Book 151, page 506. Cordelia A. Jones, surviving widow of George R. Jones, deceased January 5, 1951, to Charles Paul Jones and Laura Bell Jones. 71 acres for \$10.
- 1954 Warranty Deed, December 13, 1954. Recorded in Book 153, page 445. Laura Bell Jones, widow of Charles Paul Jones to Edward and Earl W. Batty. 76 acres for \$1.
- 1969 Warranty Deed, August 14, 1969. Recorded in Book 182, page 420. Edward and Earl Batty to United States of America. 94+ acres for \$28,850.
4. Original construction: The Bell House in its present form has changed very little from its original appearance, having undergone few alterations and/or additions. The west room on the first floor of the front section was a parlor. To the east of the narrow central hall containing the entry and enclosed straight-run stair was the living room. Above the two main rooms on the second floor were two bedrooms. In the rear wing was a large kitchen/dining room, with a shallow pantry along the north wall. Physical evidence suggests that the pantry was probably an original feature of the house. An open porch, the roof of which was formed by an extension of the gable roof over the kitchen/dining room, ran along the west side of the rear wing. The door on the east side of the kitchen/dining room was originally an exterior door reached by wood steps. Centered on the south wall of the two-story section was the front porch, three bays wide.

The clapboard siding on the house was originally painted white, with the window frames, corner boards, and trim painted a deep maroon.

5. Alterations and additions: The house has been changed very little since its construction and still has the original siding, window and door enframements, porch elements and interior finishes. The most noticeable addition is the porch which extends along the east wall of the rear wing. It is supported by a number of concrete pillars. Like the porch on the west side, it is roofed by an extension of the roof of the rear wing. An inscription, "August 29, 1914 - Jones and Bond," on the concrete steps which lead up to it indicates the probable construction date for the east porch. It was at this time that the west porch was partially enclosed by weatherboards and screening (Mrs. Laura Belle Lewellen). The wood steps leading to the door on the west side have recently been removed.

Alterations to the front porch include the removal of pilaster strips against the front wall of the building, the addition of concrete steps leading to the porch at the center bay, the removal of the balustrade on the second-floor deck and the addition of a corrugated metal roof.

At some time the east stove chimney on the front section has been replaced with a plain brick flue.

A concrete bulkhead entrance to the cellar on the east side of the front section has been added. It is sheltered by a gable-roofed shed with a vertical plank door.

Other alterations to the exterior involve routine changes for maintenance. These include: the covering of original wood shingles with asphalt shingles; the patching of original mortar in the foundation walls with cement in a number of locations; and the addition of wire nails next to the original cut nails on the siding.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the House:

Samuel F. Bell was a farmer whose landholdings included some of the richest bottom land in the county. This large frame house, built in 1880-81, is a reflection of his prosperity and of his standing in the community. However, he died in February of 1882, within a year after the house was completed, leaving the farm to his wife Elizabeth and their three daughters. The property remained within the family for seventy-two years after his death, a period spanning two succeeding generations. George and Cordelia (Bell) Jones bought the farm from the other heirs to Bell's estate, occupying it until Jones' own death in 1951. It is he who commissioned three murals to be painted on the plaster walls in the house. Local folklore has it that an itinerant artist (some say he was a dwarf) named Stevens painted the murals, although this has not been substantiated. One of the paintings, located in the chimneypiece of the parlor mantel and now covered over, reportedly depicts Jones, an avid sportsman, in a hunting scene with his five

dogs. Another, the only one which remains exposed, is an idealized Rocky Mountain scene with buffalo, prairie dogs, and deer.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: One photograph taken during the occupancy of George Jones, circa 1940; a photographic portrait of Samuel F. Bell. Both photographs are in the possession of Mrs. Laura Belle Lewellen, Center, Missouri.
2. Bibliography:
 - a. Primary sources:
 1. Batty, Mr. Earl, RFD, Center, Missouri. Personal interview, July 17, 1978. Mr. Batty lived in the house from 1954 to 1969.
 2. Cemetery inscriptions of the Bell family, St. Paul's (Roman Catholic) Parish, Center, Missouri.
 3. Estate papers of Samuel F. Bell, Box 1512, District Court Office, Ralls County Courthouse, New London, Missouri.
 4. Hunt, Karen (Platz) and Michael J. O'Brien. "National Register Nomination Form: Samuel F. Bell House." February 10, 1978. Copy in Washington, D.C., office of the National Register includes 14 photos, taken April 28, 1977. Nomination prepared in conjunction with the Historic Resources Survey, University of Nebraska, Cannon Reservoir Human Ecology Project, 1977.
 5. Lewellen, Mrs. Laura Belle, Center, Missouri. Personal interviews, July 17, 25, 29, 1978. Mrs. Lewellen is the granddaughter of Samuel Bell. She lived with her parents, George and Cordelia (Bell) Jones, in the house until her marriage in 1921.
 - b. Secondary sources:
 1. Centennial Edition, Map of Ralls County (no publisher, 1958). In Recorder of Deeds' Office, Ralls County Courthouse, New London, Missouri.
 2. Glassie, Henry. Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968).
 3. Marshall, Howard Wight. "The Concept of Folk Region in Missouri: The Case of Little Dixie." Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1976.

4. Ralls County Plat Book (New London, Missouri: S.S. Carrol & Company, no date). In Recorder's Office, New London.

Prepared by William J. Morgan
Architectural Historian
Clayton B. Fraser
Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings Survey
August 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Bell house is a two-story, double-pen, single-pile house, with central stair and end chimneys, with an integral single-story rear ell.
2. Condition of fabric: Structure and exterior: Good.
Interior finish: Fair (vandalized).

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Front section: 39'7" (five-bay front) by 18'1".
Rear wing: 34'6" by 20'0".
2. Foundations: The house is built on top of a prehistoric Indian burial mound, necessitating relatively tall foundations at the rear. Foundations under the front section and the main body of the rear wing are continuous perimeter walls of limestone rubble laid with lime-base mortar. The west porch on the rear wing is supported by two massive stone piers, the east porch by a series of thin concrete pillars.
3. Walls: Horizontal weatherboards (4½" exposure) with plain cornerboards. A fascia board which covers the building sill runs along the bases of the walls. It is capped by a beveled wood water table molding.
4. Structural system: Lightweight balloon framing using milled oak lumber with hewn oak sills. Pine lumber is used in the later porch on the east wall of the rear wing. Studs: 2x4s 16" on center; rafters: 2x4s 24" on center; ceiling joists (second floor on the front section, first on the rear): 2x6s 16" on center; floor joists (both levels, both sections): 2x7½s 16" on center; sill: 7½x8½, continuous around all original sections of the building.

5. Porches: The house has three porches, two of which have been enclosed. A 5'9"x21'3" single-story open porch on the south (front) facade covers the front door and the first flanking window on each side. Along the outside edge of the porch are four 5½"-square, boxed columns, each with paired scroll-sawn decorative brackets. The porch has 3½" pine tongue-and-groove floorboards and concrete steps leading up to it. The slightly sloped roof is presently covered with corrugated metal sheets and had at one time served as a deck reached by the second-floor door. The second porch runs the length of the west side of the rear wing, in the corner formed by the ell. Originally an open porch reached by a wood stair, it has been enclosed by weatherboards on the north and part of the west side and with screening over a low frame wall on the south part of the west side. The third porch, which runs the length of the east side of the rear wing, is enclosed completely by siding and is reached by concrete steps.
6. Chimneys: Interior end stove chimneys are centered on the ridge of the roof at both gables of the front section. Both are brick, the west one with a number of corbeled courses and the east one (a later replacement) plain, without corbels. A plain brick stove flue in the rear wing is located on the ridge of the roof, 4' in from the edge.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Two doorways, one on each floor, are centered on the front facade. The lower door is a four-panel door with a two-light transom over. The second-floor door is a heavily molded four-panel door, the upper two panels of which are elongated lights with rounded heads. Both doors are framed by plain wood exterior casings and jambs, with wood sills. The head of the upper door has a low-pitched pedimental form. The doorway between the kitchen and the east porch (originally an exterior door) is the same as the upper front door. The door to the west porch is a four-panel door with plain-board casings. Vertical plank doors are located at the shed entrance to the cellar and on the east porch.
 - b. Windows: Eight similarly sized windows, four on each floor, are arranged symmetrically on the front elevation, two bays on either side of the central bay. They are four-over-four double hung, framed by plain wood casings and sills with low-pitched pedimental heads. Similar windows are situated on the remaining sides of the front section and on all sides of the rear wing. All have shutter pintles on both sides, although the shutters have been removed. A pair of single-sash windows is located on the front face of the east enclosed porch.
8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: A moderately pitched gable roof, which runs parallel to the front facade, covers the front section. The rear wing is also covered with a gable roof with more gently sloped extensions over the porches on both sides. The original wood shingles on all roof surfaces have been covered by more recent asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornices: Molded cornices with cyma recta bedmoldings and plain frieze boards on both horizontal and raking roof edges. Soffits measure from 16" to 18". There are no gutters.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Cellar: There is a 5' cellar with dirt floor under the entire front section of the house. Access is from the shed attached to the foundation on the east.
 - b. First floor: The first floor has two rooms almost 17'-square on either side of a 3½' central hall, which contains the entry and an enclosed straight-run stair. Beneath the stair, against the rear wall of the main section of the house, are two closets, each opening into one of the two main rooms. Behind the east room is a kitchen/dining room, about 15' square, with a shallow pantry across the rear. There are enclosed flanking porches extending the full depth of the ell on both the east and west sides of the kitchen/dining room.
 - c. Second floor: There are two unequal rooms on either side of the central stair and passage. The west room is the same size as the room below; the east room is 3' smaller, because of the 3' passage running the full depth of the main section at the top of the stair. The ell has no finished second floor.
2. Stairways: A single straight-run enclosed stair ascends south-to-north in the center hall. The component parts of the stair are pine, with square newel post and balusters.
 3. Flooring: Floors generally consist of 5½" to 7" pine tongue-and-groove boards, although the flooring in the living room and the entry hall (perhaps laid later over the original floor) consists of 2¼"-wide oak boards. The floors are blind-nailed in all of the rooms except the kitchen, where they are surface-nailed.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls in both sections are generally surfaced with lath-and-plaster covered with patterned wall-paper. Ceilings throughout the house are plaster covered with

paper (which in the kitchen is painted). The west porch ceiling is made of beaded boards. The east porch ceiling shows the untreated undersides of the rafters and roofing boards.

5. Doorways and doors: Interior doors are all molded four-panel doors with cast iron rimlatches and decorative hinges. Frames on the doors on the first floor of the front section have molded casings. Those on the second floor and in the rear ell have plain casings.
6. Decorative features and trim: The walls in the front section are lined by 9½" molded baseboards on the first floor and by 8" plain baseboards on the second floor. A wainscot of beaded pine boards, capped by a molded chairrail, lines the walls of the living room. Another, of plain boards, lines the walls of the kitchen. Both are painted. Trim for doors and windows consists of molded casings, lug sills and, in the case of the windows, plain aprons. The trim is either deeply stained or painted. A pine mantel with painted graining is centered on the west wall of the parlor. It framed a stove, but never a fireplace. The most striking interior feature of the house is the mural painted on the east wall of the east bedroom upstairs, showing a mountain scene with bison and deer. It is the only one (of three, reportedly) which remains exposed in the house.
7. Mechanical systems: The building has been serviced with electricity but not indoor plumbing. Heating was by means of stoves in each room.

D. Description of Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Samuel F. Bell Farm lies on the western half of a low floodplain area in the inside arc of a bend in the Salt River. Built on top of an Indian burial mound, the house has a sweeping view of the fertile flatland fields which surround it and the heavily timbered ridges which lie across the river to the north. The house faces south within a small lawn (now overgrown) edged by large deciduous trees. The entrance road forms a long loop, passing to the south of the lawn. Immediately to the east of the lawn is a large garden area which is bordered on the north, east and south sides by a hedgerow. Man-made features of the site include wire fences along the south and east edges of the lawn, a well to the east of the house and a cistern partially under the west porch.
2. Outbuildings: Two outbuildings from the farm remain: a large barn to the south of the house and a smaller shed beyond that. The barn is a frame structure, made of milled oak lumber, with a gable roof and a small cupola centered on the ridge. The shed is also of frame construction.

Prepared by Clayton B. Fraser
Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings Survey
August 1978

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the St. Louis District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in compliance with Executive Order 11593, as a part of mitigation efforts connected with the construction of the Clarence Cannon Dam and Reservoir. HABS was engaged to document structures of cultural, historical, or architectural significance located within the Cannon Reservoir Project Area, in portions of Monroe and Ralls County, Missouri. The project was completed under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect. Recording was carried out during the summer of 1978 by Clayton B. Fraser, Project Supervisor; William T. Morgan (University of South Florida) and Travis C. McDonald (University of Virginia), Architectural Historians; Barbara A. Hendricks (University of Texas), Project Foreman; and Student Architects Dwight H. Burns (Texas Tech University), W. Michael Coppa (University of Virginia), Stephen H. Lauf (Temple University), and Michael K. Murdock (University of Texas). The data was edited in July 1979 by J.A. Chewning, Architectural Historian in the HABS Washington office. Photographs were taken by David J. Kaminsky in August 1978 and by William C. Haines between February and May 1979.

ADDENDUM TO:
SAMUEL F. BELL HOUSE
County Route CC vicinity
Center vicinity
Ralls County
Missouri

HABS MO-1204
MO, 87-CENT. V, 1-

PAPER COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001